

May 15, 2015

Robert L. DuPont, MD

Answer to Question Below

Many opioid-dependent patients enter substance abuse treatment programs that do not include buprenorphine, methadone or naltrexone in their programs. Some of these patients do well and others do not. Two distinguished abstinence-oriented treatment programs with which I am familiar now include medications as an option: Hazelden in Center City Minnesota and Kolmac in the Washington DC area. Hazelden offers both buprenorphine and naltrexone while Kolmac offers only buprenorphine. Both programs have found that some opioid patients chose medication while others do not and both have found that offering medication is useful in increasing retention in treatment of opioid dependent patients.

There is much to be said for encouraging both medication-assisted treatment and drug-free treatments to publicly report their retention rates and their rates of continued alcohol and drug use during treatment. And for both types of treatment to identify their rates of achieving 5-year recovery of patients entering their treatments. Pending these necessary assessments it would be unreasonable to insist that all drug-free treatments offer medications to their opioid patients. Beyond this I note that few MAT programs offer their patients the full range of medication options: buprenorphine, methadone and naltrexone. Treatment diversity is important. What is needed now is more data on the effectiveness of alternative treatments for opioid dependence, especially in terms of their achieving 5-Year Recovery. Even without additional data it is clear that patient dropout, drug use during treatment and relapse on discharge from treatment are major problems with all current opioid treatments, whether they offer medications or do not offer them.

The Honorable Larry Bucshon

1. What are the implications of most opioid-dependent patients not getting medication in their treatment programs?